Service-Learning Evaluation Projects
A Step-by-Step Guide

KEVIN RILEY

Combining service-learning with an evaluation project offers maximum benefits to students and agencies alike.

As individuals prepare for their future as recreation management professionals, it is imperative that they receive opportunities to put theory into practice. Service-learning projects fulfill this need because they combine specific pedagogical goals with practical community service. Researchers have suggested that service-learning is a great teaching tool that can complement and enhance traditional learning methods, such as public speaking, reading, and writing (Clark, 2002; Kunstler, 2002). By participating in service-learning projects, students internalize the theories they have learned in courses, begin to think like professionals, and develop practical knowledge. Many recreation management programs across the nation have incorporated service-learning projects into courses to enhance the development of future recreation professionals.

In the recreation management program at Appalachian State University (ASU), service-learning projects have been implemented as part of the Evaluation of Recreation and Leisure Services course in order to provide students with opportunities to participate in the evaluation processes of local agencies. In rural North Carolina, many recreation practitioners and businesses lack the necessary resources to complete evaluation endeavors because they are overburdened, understaffed, and underfunded. However, the evaluation process of recreation services, programs, participants, and facilities still must be accomplished. To assist with this dilemma, undergraduate students from ASU have been offering their services to local recreation and leisure service providers for the past six years. This creates a service-learning environment that allows both groups to benefit.

Photo courtesy of the author

A student conducts a service-learning evaluation project at Appalachian Angler, a fly-fishing business in North Carolina.

For example, local recreational agencies and businesses learn more about their clientele, programs, and policies, while ASU students learn by doing and make a better connection to evaluation theory. The purpose of this article is to provide a description of an ASU evaluation service-learning project and the step-by-step approach used to design the project, and to outline the benefits and challenges of implementing such a project.

ASU Evaluation Service-Learning Projects

In the evaluation course, students examine the methods, techniques, and application of evaluation in a variety of organizational functions that include clientele, programs, personnel, facilities, budgets, needs assessments, and economic impact estimations. Most of the evaluation projects that the students have completed for agencies have been very elementary; however, the quality of their efforts has caused many leisure service agencies to request additional evaluation projects after the first one. The evaluation projects are based on Henderson's (1995) trilogy of evaluation model, and on Rossman and Schlatter's (2000) program-planning model.

The trilogy divides an evaluation endeavor into three specific components: (1) the criteria, (2) the evidence, and (3) the judgment. The criteria component is the overall framework for the evaluation and is connected to the evaluation objectives. The evidence section addresses the project's design, development of the survey, type of data collected, and how the data will be analyzed. In the judgment section the evaluators provide to the agency their conclusions and recommendations based on the data gathered from the survey. Most students and novice practitioners find that analyzing data is challenging. However, the program-planning model focuses on simplicity and suggests that a good statistical analysis should organize data into a meaningful pattern that includes the following statistics: (1) distribution of scores (frequencies and percentage), (2) measures of central tendency (mean, mode, and median), and (3) measures of dispersion (standard deviation). Most students enrolled in this class who master these skills can report the outcomes of a program and interpret their meaning, all of which greatly assists local recreation agencies (Riley & Gaskill, 2004).

Step-By-Step Approach to Program Implementation

The following is a step-by-step account of how the evaluation service-learning project is integrated into the 15-week evaluation course at ASU (summarized in table 1). This approach is illustrated in the case study that describes one group's service-learning project (see sidebar, pp. 41-42). It is important to realize that in order for the project to benefit anyone the participating students must be prepared. This can occur only if the students take a synergistic approach to learning. This is accomplished by students attending class, reading required material, completing in-class exercises, and completing out-of-class assignments.

Step 1: Developing Evaluation Criteria and Objectives

The first step of this process is essential to the effectiveness of the service-learning project. During the first week of the course, the instructor establishes the learning environment

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Table 1. Steps to Implementing an Evaluation Service-Learning Project

Step 1: Developing Evaluation Criteria and Objectives	
Week 1	Explain the service-learning project.
Week 2	Establish evaluation teams.
Week 3	Identify, contact, and negotiate evaluation objectives with selected agency.
Week 4	Solidify evaluation criteria and objectives and provide to the course instructor written permission from the agency to conduct evaluation project.
Step 2: The Proposal	
Week 5	Word-process the project proposal and submit to instructor for critique and approval. Upon approval, then submit to agency.
Step 3: Survey Development	
Week 6	Develop the survey based on the objectives.
Week 7	Instructor and peers critique survey. Submit survey to the agency for approval.
Step 4: Data Collection	
Weeks 8-10	Collect data at the agency (multiple data collection days may be required).
Weeks 11-13	Interpret data and create the evaluation report.
Step 5: Presenting the Evaluation Project Report	
Week 14	Submit written report to instructor.
Week 15	Professional presentation from each team is given to the class, instructor, and agency. Submit revised written report to the agency.

Case Study: The Appalachian Angler Evaluation

In the following sections, three students enrolled in the Evaluation of Recreation and Leisure Services course (P. Kraska, S. Slaton, and J. Spencer) explain their 2005 evaluation project, titled "Measuring the Appalachian Angler's Customer Satisfaction in Regard to the Retail Store, Guide Service, and the Effectiveness of Their Marketing Methods."

Step 1: Developing the Criteria

After we met as a group, we decided to work with Appalachian Angler (a fly-fishing company) for the service-learning project. We then met with the owners of Appalachian Angler and developed an evaluation project that would measure the effectiveness of the company in terms of meeting its customers' needs. The owners welcomed our project, and after three meetings we developed the criteria and objectives to be evaluated for the study. Based on these conversations, we decided to investigate the following three areas: (1) effectiveness of the current web page, (2) customer satisfaction regarding the retail shop, and (3) customer satisfaction regarding the company's guide service.

Step 2: The Proposal

We submitted a written proposal that was reviewed and fine-tuned by our professor to ensure that the research objectives would be measured correctly. In this written proposal, we reviewed the literature associated with the three evaluation objectives that would help us develop the survey. In addition, we created a time-line for collecting data and addressed how the survey would be administered to the Appalachian Angler customers.

Step 3: Survey Development

Our survey consisted of Likert responses, dichotomous statements, open-ended questions, and demographic questions. The following specific objectives were created to pinpoint areas of concern:

1. To measure whether products are reasonably priced.
2. To measure whether customers feel that the store is well stocked to meet their needs.
3. To evaluate staff performance.
4. To assess how participants access information about Appalachian Angler.
5. To measure how customers feel about Appalachian Angler's web site.
6. To gauge whether customers want to see more online features.
7. To measure how well guides are transferring their knowledge to their customers.
8. To assess whether guides are meeting customers at their skill level.
9. To gather demographic information (name, address, phone numbers, email, age, and skill level) about the Appalachian Angler's customers.

Objectives one through three assisted the owners of Appalachian Angler in determining whether they were meeting their customers' needs and whether improvements needed to be made to any of the specific areas. Objectives four through six evaluated the customers' preference for Internet marketing (e.g., the best way to reach the customer), possible new web page features (e.g., links to weather reports, fishing guides profiles, and sale items), and specific desired web media (e.g., compressed videos and tutorials). Objectives seven and eight evaluated the customers' satisfaction with the fishing guide's services. Objective nine gathered crucial marketing information for the company.

Step 4: Data Collection

The participants in this study were previous customers of Appalachian Angler. The owners provided us with the email addresses and telephone numbers of these customers.

Data were obtained using three survey methods: online survey, paper-and-pencil survey (distributed in the retail store), and telephone survey. Originally, we felt that the online surveys would be the most effective and efficient use of our time, since the customers' data would be captured in an Excel file and then analyzed. However, the online surveys provided us with the lowest success rate, with only 15 percent of the customers providing information through this medium. We experienced problems with this method because some customers did not have the necessary software to complete the survey. Therefore, we decided to use a telephone survey, which gave us a return rate of 35 percent. We experienced some frustration using this method for the following reasons: (1) no one was there to answer the phone, (2) people would hang up on us, and (3) appropriate times to call are limited. We then chose to implement a traditional paper-and-pencil survey that was distributed to return customers in the retail shop. This method had

Case Study continued

the highest return rate, which accounted for 50 percent of the surveys.

We entered the survey data into SPSS (a software package) to analyze the results. The research objectives assisted us in compiling the evaluation report for the business and for delivering our oral presentation to the class.

Step 5: Evaluation Project Report

Based on the data analysis, we felt overall that Appalachian Angler's customers were satisfied with the retail shop and the fishing guide service. However, we identified areas of concern when examining the effectiveness of the web page. For example, customers did not prefer shopping online, but ironically the data suggested that most of the customers would like the option of purchasing gear and booking trips online. In the latter stage of the evaluation process, we had to make recommendations to the company. We felt the customers' web page concerns needed to be addressed. Based on the identified customer concerns, we suggested that the company consider adding the option of booking fishing trips and purchasing gear online.

According to class procedures, we had to reflect on and report our personal insights about the service-learning project. We reported that at times we were very frustrated with using the various survey techniques (i.e., online, telephone, and paper-and-pencil). If we were to conduct another evaluation of a company, we would be more organized and allow more time to collect survey data. Finally, we commented on how the trilogy of evaluation model assisted our research project by keeping us connected to our research objectives. The model also guided us in making appropriate conclusion and recommendation statements to the company.

by providing the students with an overview of the project, including the goals, objectives, and requirements to complete the project. After this initial discussion, students are allowed to establish their own evaluation teams (three students per team). According to Moorman and Arellano-Unruh (2002), allowing students to decide their own team members encourages them to take ownership of the project, which is important to the project's success.

During week three, each team selects an agency that they will evaluate. Students must make contact with the agency and together determine what the criteria will be for the evaluation. Through these negotiations with a supervisor of the agency, the team identifies the objectives of the evaluation project.

By week four, teams need to solidify the evaluation criteria and objectives with the agency. They also need to solicit written permission from the agency to conduct the evaluation and submit this to the instructor.

Step 2: The Proposal

During the fifth week of the course, each team should submit a word-processed proposal to the instructor for approval. This proposal should contain the following five specific components: (1) evaluation objectives; (2) background information on the agency, including contact person and their contact information; (3) method for conducting the survey (how they plan to collect the data); (4) project schedule for the entire semester; and (5) a brief literature review that supports their evaluation objectives or variables. Upon instructor approval, each team submits their proposal to the agency.

Step 3: Survey Development

During weeks six and seven, each team submits a survey instrument to the instructor. After the survey is refined and graded according to agreed evaluation objectives of the agency, the evaluation team will then present their survey to the class and the instructor for a verbal critique. The peer-group critique is extremely beneficial to the evaluation team because it raises questions regarding both content validity and reliability of the survey. At the end of week seven, each team presents the final draft of the survey to the agency for approval. Once the survey has been approved, the team can begin to collect data.

Step 4: Data Collection

This step in the process involves the collection of the data using the approved survey. During weeks eight through 10, the team will work in the agency setting to collect the necessary data. Most data collection requires multiple days. After completing the data collection, the team focuses on interpreting the data and creating the evaluation report. During weeks 11 through 13, the students learn to use various computer programs to create graphs and slide presentations for their reports.

Step 5: Presenting the Evaluation Project Report

In the final step of the process, each team submits their final written report to the instructor and presents their material to the class and the agency. This professional presentation lasts 20 to 25 minutes. One section of the presentation requires the team to provide recommendations on the overall evaluation design. Also, they must provide examples of the benefits and challenges of the process. During this period, students are amazed at how survey participants often make the same mistakes that are addressed in both lectures and readings. In addition, the presentation includes a question-and-answer period from the audience. This provides the

Table 2. Benefits and Challenges of Service-Learning Project

Agency Benefits	Student Benefits	Professor Benefits
The evaluation report assisted us with our marketing efforts. The project increased our understanding of which states attend the Camp Fair. The enthusiasm and professionalism of the students was a breath of fresh air to our agency. The economic impact evaluation summary allowed our association to lobby for hotel discounts for next year's tournament.	Organizing the material helped me professionally. We gathered a lot of data and were able to apply it in a straightforward evaluation report. Learning the evaluation process and having it explained by my friends increased my understanding. I learned more than I ever expected about evaluation and surveys. This project put everything together.	Students wake up in this course and represent our school quite well. This project gives us a better visual presence in the community. This course promotes learning and benefits our local recreation providers. This project allows students to understand group cohesion and they get to network with practitioners.
Agency Challenges	**Student Challenges**	**Professor Challenges**
Students did not have the expertise to evaluate what we wanted. Our image is on the line and we want to make sure the students represent our agency in a professional manner. We did not know what to evaluate. In the future we will focus on our program objectives and instructor assessments. Last year's group was much more prepared and did a better job.	Doing survey research and approaching participants was uncomfortable. Meeting with other group members was always a challenge. Trying to learn the theory and apply it at the same time was overwhelming. Time management and data collection was a big drawback for our group.	Preparing the students to meet all the challenges of an evaluation project. Motivating students to complete their assignment so they will understand all of the components of the evaluation project. Make sure the related assignments are graded and immediately returned so they can model the assignment in their evaluation project. Expecting too much from them or narrowing the scope of the project.

teams with the opportunity to reflect on the significance of the overall project.

Benefits and Challenges

Comments about the benefits and challenges of this process—from students, instructors, and agency personnel—appear in table 2. Service-learning projects are certainly challenging; however, these challenges can benefit all involved. Clark (2002) suggested that when challenges are seen as opportunities for growth and learning, they are accepted and even welcomed. One major challenge during a semester-long project is students' time commitment. Students will need to meet outside of the classroom. However, this can be turned into a benefit, as it encourages students to learn time management and to work together effectively. It also enhances the students' professional growth and prepares them for real-world settings.

Researchers have suggested that students should be reminded that the project requires them to multi-task and to provide long-term effort and sustained commitment to the agency. This is difficult for some students, since they typically have limited skills, meager knowledge, and little commitment to the agency (Estes, Wilson, & Toupence, 2001).

Another foreseen challenge is the grading of the project. To reduce this challenge, the instructor should develop an objective assessment for both the written report assignment and the oral presentation. This is extremely important, because the various agencies may have different criteria and evaluation objectives that are to be measured.

Another benefit of the service-learning project examined in this article is that it assists the students in comprehending evaluation concepts due to its focus on several different learning styles: auditory (listening to a brief lecture), participatory (becoming an active learner), and retention (explaining what the data represents by using relevant terminology). Clark (2002) implied that the benefits outweigh the challenges in service-learning and that every student receives something different from the experience. Students move from being dependent learners, to independent learners, and finally to interdependent learners. It is hoped that the students will comprehend that unity and teamwork, combined with the knowledge of others, is the only way to satisfy the needs of the community. This is an invaluable lesson that will

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~~*Anne Jobling (ajobling@uq.edu.au) is a senior lecturer at the University of Queensland School of Education, Brisbane 4072, Queensland, Australia. Naznin Virji-Babul is the director of applied clinical research at the Down Syndrome Research Foundation, Burnaby, B.C., Canada V5B 4J8. Doug Nichols is the director of the School of Physical Education at the University of Victoria, Victoria, B.C., Canada V8W 3P1.*~~

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resonate throughout their lives. A major factor associated with a positive service-learning experience is the student's degree of interest in the subject matter. This allows the student to view education as a learning experience, rather than as just the memorization of rote knowledge (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000).

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Kevin Riley (rileykw@appstate.edu) is an assistant professor in the Department of Health, Leisure, and Exercise Science at Appalachian State University, Boone, NC 28606.

~~Editorial~~

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~~the triad to hide in the shadow of popular obesity issues. It is important for those working with young females, including parents, physical educators, and coaches, to be trained about energy needs during intense workouts and to understand the nutritional requirements for normal growth and development during adolescence (Golden, 2002). It also is important that physical education teachers and coaches deemphasize the association between a lean body shape and performance and focus on educating females about sound nutritional principles for enhancing overall health (Beals, 2000). Similarly, it is important to teach females to work towards enhancing personal health and well-being (e.g., stress management, making good food choices, eating regular meals and healthy snacks) instead of focusing on an arbitrary weight goal set by the sport, a coach, parent, or friend (Manore, 2002). Females can tell if they are making progress by measuring positive changes in their energy levels and performance, noting a decrease in injuries and illnesses, the return of normal menstruation, and general well-being (Manore). Overall, it is essential to ensure that young, active females consume a healthy diet and maintain the energy needed in order to maintain a regular menstrual cycle for optimal health and performance.~~

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